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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HONG KONG 003970

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DEPT FOR EAP AND EAP/CM
NSC FOR WILDER
FOR G/SENK SENIOR ADVISOR WHITON

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [HK](#) [CH](#) [MC](#) [KN](#)
SUBJECT: G/SENK VISIT TO HONG KONG AND MACAU

Classified By: ACTING DEPUTY PRINCIPAL OFFICER LAURENT CHARBONNET. REA
SONS: 1.4(B AND D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Christian Whiton, Senior Advisor to Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea Jay Lefkowitz (G/SENK), during a September 29-30 visit briefed Hong Kong Legislative Council members and NGO representatives on United States policies toward North Korean refugees and the implications of the North Korea Human Rights Act of 2004. He also traveled to Macau to continue his dialogue with NGO activists working on North Korean refugee issues. End summary.

Meetings With Hong Kong Lawmakers

¶2. (C) Christian Whiton, Senior Advisor to Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea Jay Lefkowitz, briefed Legislative Council (Legco) Members and rights activists Emily Lau, Martin Lee and Leung Kwok Hung ("Long Hair") on the role of the Special Envoy for North Korea and the work of the G/SENK office, during separate meetings on September 29. He noted USG concern over the human rights situation in North Korea and the estimated 20,000 - 200,000 North Korean refugees in the PRC, and noted our responsibility, under the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004, to facilitate humanitarian assistance to these refugees. According to Whiton, these refugees had fled North Korea to escape starvation and persecution, but the PRC generally viewed them as "economic migrants" and returned them to North Korea where they were incarcerated or worse. Whiton told Lau, Lee and Leung that his purpose in visiting Hong Kong was to increase understanding of the North Korean refugee situation, in case any North Korean refugees ever reached the HKSAR. While the Legco members were unaware of cases of North Koreans coming through Hong Kong, they professed sympathy for such cases, should they occur.

¶3. (C) Lau said she would urge the Hong Kong Government (HKG) to treat such cases humanely. Recently, she said, many asylum seekers from Africa and South Asia had arrived in Hong Kong, but these were largely the responsibility of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Lau urged the USG to consider providing more resources to the UNHCR. Long-time democracy advocate Martin Lee described his efforts over the years to try to protect and expand Hong Kong citizens, civil and human rights but noted the sensitivity with which citizens here, and the Hong Kong government, viewed refugees and undocumented migrants. Leung Kwok Hung thought that Hong Kong, with its stringent immigration controls and political sensitivity toward refugees, would not make a good route for fleeing North Koreans, though it could

serve as an information-dissemination and organizing base for NGOs from the region who sought to assist these persons.

NGOs Unaware of North Korean Refugees in Hong Kong

14. (C) Whiton also briefed Kathi Zellweger, International Cooperation Director (strictly protect) of Caritas - Hong Kong, on the role of SENK, including its concerns about the human rights situation in North Korea. (Background: Zellweger has traveled in and out of North Korea as an aid worker since 1995. She is leaving Caritas and will head the Swiss Government's office for development based in Pyongyang. End Background.) Whiton inquired whether Caritas was able to ensure that its deliveries of food aid and other commodities in North Korea reached the people in need, and were not diverted to the military or Government. Zellweger said that Caritas had been successful in this regard, noting that careful planning for such deliveries was essential. Some South Korean NGOs, whose "hearts head off common sense," had difficulties in this area. She said Caritas, with long experience in North Korea, treated it like any other "difficult country": they signed an agreement for each program, then closely monitored implementation. In the case of food aid, she observed that there remained a risk that the commodities would be bartered or sold by their recipients, but this was not necessarily bad in that the food aid "filtered down" and the practice encouraged development of the markets. Regarding the recent floods, Zellweger said she was skeptical about the large number of casualties reported by South Korean organizations.

15. (C) Zellweger said the North Korean Government (NKG) was "very pragmatic now" regarding economic policy. The private

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markets were "huge" and the Government could not close them because large numbers of people depended upon them. She estimated that 75-80 percent of the goods sold in the markets, including food, household goods, and other items, came from the PRC.

16. (C) Zellweger said Caritas has not operated any programs for North Korean refugees in China; doing so would have jeopardized their relations with the NKG. In her many years in Hong Kong, she had never heard of any North Korean refugees arriving here.

17. (C) Whiton and Consulate General control officers attended two meetings (in Hong Kong and Macau) of the Brussels-based group Human Rights Without Frontiers (HRWF), active in assisting fleeing North Korean refugees. At the two meetings, HRWF representatives from around the region described their efforts to bring North Korean refugees through China and across borders into Southeast Asian countries. The group's consensus was that recent events, particularly disruptions caused by the coup in Thailand, had already begun to make the Southeast Asia route more difficult and expensive. The group recommended that the northern route through Mongolia be expanded as it seemed safer and more coherent. In Macau, Jill Ferguson-Rigg (strictly protect), Committee Member of the British Business Association of Macau, hosted a dinner for HRWF and Whiton, which Mark Taylor, the Senior Coordinator for the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (G/TIP), and poloff also attended, with Jim Thomas, Director of HRWF.

18. (C) Comment: Whiton's visit helped raise awareness of the North Korean refugee situation among Hong Kong Legco members and NGOs. Our contacts were unaware of any North Korean refugees coming through Hong Kong and the general consensus was that Hong Kong would not necessarily be a welcoming or easy destination for North Korean refugees to come through. End Comment.

19. (SBU) G/SENK has cleared this cable.

